

CORPORATE PERSONALITY. In Scripture and in human experience, self-awareness, moral and legal responsibility, blessing and trouble, reward and punishment are corporate as well as individual realities. Thus Israel and other nations can speak as 'I' as well as 'we' (Num 20-21); the fate of a family can be bound up together (Josh 7); one generation can bear the consequences of earlier generations' sins (Matt 23:35); a church can be addressed as a person invited to open its 'heart' to Christ (Rev 3:20).

For a period in the mid-20th century, under the influence of the work of H. Wheeler Robinson (1872-1945), the OT version of this common phenomenon was given a rather mystical connotation by being described in terms of 'corporate personality' connected with a primitive way of experiencing reality that was different from our modern way. The theory was used to explain passages in the Psams which alternate between 'I' and 'we', and the servant passages in Isaiah 40 — 55 with their changing identification of the servant. But it is now discredited, and such passages are better approached in other ways. There is no need for the hypothesis that OT or NT people's corporate or individual self-awareness was radically different from our own.

Bibliography

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